

Endor\$ements 101

BY STAN HALL

It inevitably happens at every trade show... “Did you hear how much they paid so & so to play such & such?” Regardless of whether or not the rumor is true, which it usually isn’t, endorsements are often misunderstood, blown out of proportion and sometimes sadly abused. In order to shed some light on the subject, Drumhead sent out a questionnaire to several artists and artist relations personnel to get their take on the matter, and set the record straight about what is and isn’t: expected, needed, tolerated and appreciated from both sides of the coin. Our thanks to those who responded.

Endorsements: the brass ring, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, more free gear than you can literally shake a drumstick at. It’s what we all want, right? Except there ain’t no free ride. As Mars Volta drumming phenomenon Thomas Pridgen puts it, “No one has to give you shit; no one has to show you interest.”

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Making a play for endorsements may be putting the cart before the horse, and actually can be detrimental to a drummer’s career. Todd Sucherman, drummer extraordinaire for Styx and Brian Wilson, offers his perspective: “I think a lot of younger players think that getting endorsements is like crossing into the end zone, along with the celebratory touchdown dance. I see these guys scrambling around NAMM and hitting everybody up and I think, ‘what are you doing?’”

Latino jazz master Antonio Sanchez adds “When I was at Berklee I remember there were a lot of kids that seemed way more interested in how to get endorsements than in practicing and getting better. I believe that if you put your all into your music, the endorsements will come to you. Always trying to hunt down deals while you’re not ready can be counterproductive for your career and your actual playing.”

THE ETERNAL TRIANGLE

Keeping that in mind, let’s say you’ve got your priorities straight and you’ve become a pretty good drummer and now you’re thinking about getting an endorsement. How does it work? Endorsements involve the eternal triangle: the (drum, cymbal, drumhead, stick, accessories, hardware) manufacturer, the artist (insert your favorite drummer’s name here or, potentially, your own name), and the purchasing public (all us sweaty, callous-handed drummers banging away out there in boom-boom land).

“If you put your all into your music, the endorsements will come to you.”

-Antonio Sanchez

We all know that the first two enter into some kind of agreement/arrangement designed to influence the third group to buy stuff to keep the manufacturers in business—that much is common knowledge. But exactly how does it work, and how free is free? Let’s take a look.

MUSIC IS NUMBERS: DO THE MATH

An endorsement is a business agreement between a manufacturer and an artist. Like all good equations, this one has to balance. The manufacturer supplies equipment (at low or no cost) to artist in exchange for exposure to potential customers who will be influenced by that artist to purchase the gear he uses. Free stuff for one drummer needs to result in increased sales for manufacturer.

Joe Testa, former international artist relations manager for drums at Yamaha, sees the equation this way: “The artist receives professional drum equipment that he believes is the best instrument to represent his musical voice. The artist also gets the support

needed in all relative circumstances. In turn, the manufacturer hopes to receive additional drum sales due to the overwhelming amount of exposure and drum fans that particular artist influences.” No mystery there.

His view is echoed by Mike Farriss, a 13-year vet at Pearl Drums: “There are drummers with great talent and there are great bands. Both are important. As a company we have much to offer drummers in the way of support worldwide. We have to look at what the drummer can do to help us increase sales. Can this artist help us sell more drums? If an artist is influential and their opinion is valued, this can be used to help get a positive word out about our product. Bottom line, however, is: will they have a positive impact on our sales?”

Zildjian’s John DeChristopher, Vice President, Artist Relations & Event Marketing elaborates: “There are many factors which make up the criteria for signing a Zildjian artist, including, but not limited to, a high profile playing situation, his or her ability on the instrument, realm of influence in the marketplace (this could be a playing situation, teaching, etc), career longevity, loyalty and above all else, someone who truly loves and uses Zildjian products. The artist ‘endorses’ Zildjian, Zildjian does not endorse the artist, so the onus is on him or her to promote our products, not Zildjian promoting the artist. This is a common misconception. I often remind people that Zildjian is a manufacturer of cymbals and drumsticks—that’s our business, plain and simple. We’re not a promotional agency in the business of furthering an artist’s career.



Joe Testa: Yamaha 12 Years

The artist program is geared to sell our products to consumers, utilizing influential artists in our advertising, clinic and other marketing programs. Our ability to sign and utilize influential artists in our advertising drives our business, which in turn allows us to maintain the artist program."

Bobby Boos, currently 20 years with Sabian, can toss you some numbers: "Someone who offers a certain level of exposure regularly, that justifies my time...TV, downloads, video, touring on something that is selling tickets (benchmark for me is 3,000 seats per night). Are you going to influence someone to go out and by a cymbal or are you just slamming away mindlessly? Think about that. They need to come to the table with more than 'I play 250 nights a year.' Where do you play, are you looking for a free ride just because you play a lot and don't want to pay for the product anymore? At some point on some level, and this gets more difficult all the time as budgets are shrinking, somebody has to be buying the product or we're out of business."

Others concur. Steve "Lobie" Lobmeier in Artist Relations at D'Addario & Co. (Evans drumheads) has a one-word mantra: "Visibility. Is this artist in a position to potentially influence end users of our products to make a purchase?" Marco Soccoli at Vic Firth reveals what his company's looking for in an endorser: "His ability to play and the type of music he's playing. The band he's in and the publicity they're getting."

And professional drummers are not

"It's really awesome when you see a bunch of amazing artists who you respect come together in one room and get all excited about new gear." - Joe Testa

unaware of this. Todd Sucherman explains: "It's important to realize that, in the end, your relationship with a company has to be economically beneficial to them. The higher your profile is, and how much you're in front of people playing the gear, often determines your standing within the company, not how many jokes you know or how fast you can twirl your sticks."

Bill Bruford, longtime Tama, ProMark, and Evans endorser also acknowledges this

"I'm very loyal to wives, musicians and manufacturers alike, so it has to go completely off the rails for me to move."

-Bill Bruford

reality: "You are entering into a commercial relationship with the company. In return for your visible use of the product, preferably on TV and video, and creative feedback, you will be assured a reasonable supply of the item(s) free of charge."

PROFILING - THE WANTED LIST

Now that we know what the deal is, how does one go about getting that deal? What are the manufacturers looking for? If you want lots of shiny new stuff, make sure you can find yourself in their descriptions.

Joe Testa weighs in with his considerations. 1) Business: "Some of the business considerations would be music sales

approaching upper Billboard chart levels; television, studio, movie, and video credits; participation in high visibility tours; or teaching credentials from a major university or education systems." 2) The artist: "An artist's popularity is essential. Will that artist influence the buying public? 3) Does the artist already play the company's product they're trying to get an endorsement from? That is important because it shows that they already believe in the instrument and are now just seeking an official and public announcement of their musical voice." 4) Personality: "Each and every artist has their own personality, but for me it is about putting all of them together and building a diverse, but close family. That means they have to be a likable person who can hang." 5) And talent: "I believe that the quality, not the quantity of a roster best represents the instrument. I always stand behind the artists I represent... and their abilities."

Notice the order. You don't have to be one of the world's greatest drummers to be an endorsee; if that were the case, there'd only be about ten of them. Joe Testa again: "I never needed more artists. What I always looked for were team players. You can always add drummers who want to play on a team."

Companies want to be sure that the people representing them will do so in a professional



John DeChristopher: Zildjian 20 Years

"The artist 'endorses' Zildjian, Zildjian does not endorse the artist." - John DeChristopher



Bobby Boos: Sabian 20 Years

manner. If you can rip out single-stroke rolls faster than Mike Mangini but if you're seen performing acts that will get you thrown in an Indonesian jail, you're probably not a good candidate for an endorsement. If you don't get that, then you're probably not going to get an endorsement, either. Sabian's Bobby Boos lays it out for you: "We expect a certain level of professionalism; at this level, if you don't get that, we aren't interested." Wayne Wilburn, Paiste rep and former drum tech/assistant to Terry Bozzio, puts it even more bluntly: "I look for a high level of playing ability, professionalism, good attitude, and for the guy not to be an asshole."

PEOPLE WHO NEED PEOPLE

With almost no exception, one of the most important factors to both manufacturers and drummers is the personal dimension. Many of the percussion manufacturing companies are literally family operations (Zildjian, Paiste, Vic Firth, ProMark, Sabian, Vater, Regal Tip)



Mike Farriss: Pearl 13 Years

“At some point on some level, and this gets more difficult all the time as budgets are shrinking, somebody has to be buying the product or we’re out of business.” - Bobby Boos

and many others (Yamaha, Pearl, Remo) act like it.

Joe Testa again: "The family is the most important thing. Getting together, working and socializing as a group are essential to a successful roster. The Groove Night shows I produced with Rick Marotta were great examples of a family vibe in full force. Those shows were real-life family moments."

And their endorsers appreciate that vibe. One of them, the aforementioned Antonio Sanchez, puts it this way: "I just like the feeling of being part of a family and knowing that you're being taken care of. I don't like when the relationship is cold and exclusively business."

“Becoming a great friend of Armand Zildjian was probably the greatest reward that I could ever receive!”

- Gregg Bissonette

He's not the only one. Thomas Pridgen likes to keep it local: "DW is in Oxnard, California, so I actually get to talk face-to-face to the guy who paints the drums, another guy who makes the hardware and pedals, Don and John Good who design all the gear—that's special, that's beyond free drums and free cymbals. I can also call the president of DW and talk drums or not. How many people can say that," continues Pridgen.

"I think life's rewards are the relationships you have and the things you learn, I have the best companies around me that anyone could ask for, I get great gear and I love those guys personally. The Zildjian, Evans, Vater, DW familia are my big brothers and sisters.

"And I got so much love for Carol Callato at Regal Tip; she was the first person from any company to give me an endorsement, and I was only 9-years-old."

It works the same way across the pond. Bill Bruford reveals how much that personal feeling can matter: "Being an international freelancer means you spend a lot of time on your own, and an endorsement relationship may provide a real sense of camaradie, both with the company people and your other colleagues who use the product."

Fellow Brit and Tama endorser Simon Phillips concurs: "A big part of the relationship is down to the people that you work with and share the endorsement with. I think that is what has kept my relationship with Tama going for so long. Many of the same people that I met in 1978 are still there—just a little grayer."

Jason Bittner puts it in no uncertain terms: "A strong personal relationship is always first for me, I want to be friends with my reps before anything. My initial Tama rep Gene Provencio, signed me up with the company in 2002 and since then has definitely become one of my closest friends, period! Same with Kev from Pro Mark and, without a doubt, Norbert and Chris from Meinl!"

Todd Sucherman acknowledges how that personal relationship pervades everything: "One of the greatest things are the friendships I've made with people at various companies along the way through seeing them at trade shows, visits in town or at after-show gatherings at gigs, through phone conversations and emails, or riding hundreds of miles together in a car on a clinic tour. I'm fortunate to feel that way about the people behind the gear that I use. And that feeling goes onstage with me every night."

Mike Farriss of Pearl sums it up plain and simple, "It's about relationships. It isn't Artist Service, it's Artist Relations."

LETTING GO

Sounds like a perfect world—I love you, you love me, we all sit around and play free drums under the big happy tree. Is it always like that? Testa admits, "It is about family, but every

“It’s about relationships. It isn’t Artist Service, it’s Artist Relations.” - Mike Farriss

“We’ve never dropped an endorsee, ever. Vic says, ‘If he’s part of the family, he’s part of the family.’” - Marco Soccoli

once in a while someone surprises you. You think you are closer to them than you really are, and you come to the realization that for some people, it is all business. I understand some people have to make decisions for money and business reasons, but I am very proud of the fact that none of the people who ever left a roster I managed did so because of their disappointment in the instrument or because of the treatment they received from my office. It has always been a business decision they made.”

ON THE MOVE

There’s no denying that some endorsers move around from one company to another. Some never move; Gene Krupa played Slingerland drums his entire career. Some others, like Bill Bruford, move infrequently: “I’m very loyal to wives, musicians and manufacturers alike, so it has to go completely off the rails for me to move. I’ve only moved from one drum company to another in 41 years, and that was from Ludwig to Tama in 1980 because Tama had come on strong with a ton of innovative ideas: bell-brass snare drums, boom cymbal stands, gong toms, octobans etc, all of which I felt I could use immediately in the new King Crimson we were forming. Tama continues to be highly innovative to this day.”

And still others seem to bounce around like pinballs, careening from one company to another. While the credibility of an artist’s endorsement is usually directly proportionate to the longevity with a given company, there are a number of reasons why someone might decide to make a move.

Carmine Appice, who in his 40+ year career has been with Ludwig, Syndrum, Premier, Pearl, Mapex, Slingerland, and now ddrum, has some specific reasons: “Well, if a company closes down like Slingerland just did, they made great drums but there was no company, no support, no drums in the store, no presence in the drum business – this would make you want to leave. If the company does have a presence, you might want to leave because they were bought by another company and they changed all the people you deal with. If you don’t get along with

them, your option is to leave!” What keeps him on board? “Them being able to get gear around the world and being good people to work with, like the ddrum company already feels like family.”

Todd Sucherman chimes in: “There are many reasons why changes occur. One scenario is simply falling in love with another product. Another might be simply not getting taken care of or seeming as if you’re not on the company’s radar at all. Sometimes the guy you’ve built your relationship with at a company is let go or gets another job somewhere else, and maybe you don’t ‘groove’ with the new guy handling your account. Perhaps the gear you’re receiving is sub par to what you had been receiving in the past. Sometimes it’s just time to move on.”

“How much you’re in front of people playing the gear, often determines your standing within the company, not how many jokes you know or how fast you can twirl your sticks.”

- Todd Sucherman

Although the always-affable Gregg Bissonette has loyally used DW pedals for 26 years now (he was actually the first guy to take out the prototype double for DW on a year-long Maynard Ferguson big-band tour in 1983), he has changed drum companies over the years. He chronicles his shifts and the reasons behind them: “I left Yamaha



Marco Soccoli: Vic Firth 10 Years

drums in 1987 because I wanted to play maple drums, and they said that Yamaha would never make maple drums. I left Pearl in 1993 because they cut back on their drum clinics, and I love to do drum clinics. I left Slingerland in 1996 because I wanted to work with the drums and the people at Mapex Drums.” He seems to have found what he wanted with Mapex, since he’s been with them 13 years and counting now, and Zildjian for over 25 years. “With Zildjian I have great quality and great people to work with. Becoming a great friend of Armand Zildjian was probably the greatest reward that I could ever receive!”

Jason Bittner is direct and to the point: “Sound quality. Each time I changed drum heads (Aquarian to Evans to Remo), it was only because of sound quality, it had nothing to do with who would give me a better deal. Another thing is playability: I tried to use Iron Cobras for two years since I am a Tama artist, but after so much struggle, I went to DW



Steve Lobmeier: Evans 11.5 Years

“Artist input is important, as long as the ideas aren’t too esoteric and are potentially marketable.” - Steve Lobmeier

antonio sanchez
artista seriea drumstick

Antonio Sánchez, uno de los músicos del jazz más reconocidos del mundo y miembro del jazz Metheny Group, diseñó sus baquetas Zildjian con un mango rotatorio para con la parte superior extra grande y más pesada, para darle mayor poder a sus golpes cuando lo necesita al improvisar. También presenta una punta en forma de barril que produce una articulación distintiva y única de tambor completo, haciendo a las baquetas Antonio Sánchez Artist Series perfectas para jazz, funk y fusion.



Simon Phillips

Current Endorsements:
Tama: 30 years
Zildjian: 30 years
Remo: 26 years
Pro Mark: 27 years
Shure Microphones: 13 years
XL Specialty Cases: 15 years
Past Endorsements:
Cost endorsement with Paiste: 1 year
Arbiter Autotune: 1 rehearsal & 1 show

Gregg Bissonette

Current Endorsements:
Mapex: 12 years • Zildjian: 26 years
Remo: 26 years • Vic Firth: 26 years
DW double pedals: 26 years
LP: 26 years
LT Lug Locks: 26 years
Beato gloves and soft cases: 21 years
XL Specialty hard shell cases: 14 years
Shure Microphones: 14 years
Roland electronic drums: 6 years
EPAD warm up pad: 8 years
Real Feel practice pads: 4 years
Past Endorsements:
Yamaha: 4 years
Pearl: 6 years
Slingerland: 3 years

Carmine Apicce

Current Endorsements:
Ddrum: new • Sabian: 22 years
Vic Firth: 19 years • Aquarian: 19 years
Shure: 10 years • Calzone: 30 years
ZoomH2: 10 years • Hansenfutz: 2 years
DW pedals: 20 years
Past Endorsements:
Ludwig: 13 years • Pearl: 5 years
Premier: 5 years • Mapex: 13 years
Paiste: 13 years • Zildjian: 4 years
Remo: 12 year
Calato: 10 years

Antonio Sanchez

Current Endorsements
Yamaha: 6 years
Zildjian Cymbals and Sticks: 15 years
Evans: 6 years
LP: 5 years
Past Endorsements:
Sabian: Less than 1 year
Legend Drums: 2 years

Thomas Pridgen

Current Endorsements:
DW: 8 years
Zildjian: 15 years
Vater: 9 years
Evans: 8 years
Past Endorsements:
Pearl
Remo
Regal Tip

Jason Bittner

Current Endorsements:
Tama: 7 years
Meinl: 10 years
Pro-Mark: 7 years
Remo: 2 years
DW pedals: 1 year
XL cases: 3 years
Roland: 3 years
Samson/Zoom Products: 2 years
Past Endorsements:
Aquarian: 5 years
Evans: 5 years

Bill Bruford

Current Endorsements:
Tama: 30 years
Paiste: 35 years
Evans: 22 years
Promark: 15 years
Shure Microphones: 25 years
XL Specialty Cases: 19 years
Past Endorsements:
Ludwig: 4 years
Simmons Electronics: 15 years
Remo: 5 years

Todd Sucherman

Current Endorsements:
Pearl: 9 years • Sabian: 11 years
Pro Mark: 5 years • Remo: 10 years
Audix: 2 years • Toca: 1 year
Past Endorsements:
Sonor: 3 years • Ayotte: 1 year
Zildjian: 3 years
Vic Firth: 9 years

because, simply put, I could play easier and more comfortably on their pedals.”

Sanchez also mentions quality of the instrument: “I think for me it would just hinge around product quality and preference. I don’t believe in changing companies often just because they offer better situations for the artist that don’t have anything to do with their actual products (advertising, deals for signature products, etc). I’m a believer of using a brand or a product because that’s what you really prefer to play.”

For Thomas Pridgen, it’s both the instrument and the people: “I’ve left companies because I’ve felt disconnected to them personally. I’ve also left companies because of consistency, backline-wise. Sometimes you get standard sizes, then sometimes you get power toms. It’s weird to me to deal with someone that works in the States but needs the okay of someone who lives in Japan.”

Simon Phillips is more philosophical: “Every manufacturer goes through problematic times. I am happy to weather those times as long as I see a ‘fix’ being pursued and a willingness to cure whatever problems arise. Some things may not be what you would ideally like but do not really affect your performance that much. Other things are a problem and really affect your standing as a musician. That has to be carefully dealt with. If I find that there are too many problems with no prospect of curing them, then that would be the time I would have to seriously consider a change. At some point in these many years that I have had these endorsements, there have been some issues, but they were dealt with pretty quickly and we could move on and enjoy our relationship.”

Of course, there are times that the company may decide to sever the cord for a variety of reasons: abusing the endorsement, inactivity, lack of respect for the product, making room for new artists, an artist playing another product without notice, but not so in some cases. Vic Firth never had to stick it to someone and pull the plug as Marco Socoli proudly states, “We’ve never dropped an endorsee, ever. Vic says, ‘If he’s part of the family, he’s part of the family.’”

BE A SPORT

So, you’re thinking, hey, basketball players get about ten billion dollars to wear somebody’s sneakers, why don’t musical manufacturers toss some of that big green to drummers to bang on their stuff? Sounds great, but there’s a slight problem with that: professional sports is a much bigger economic engine than the music business. Think about it for a second, how many people do you see in a given day wearing sneakers? And on that same day how many people do you see walking around with a pair of drumsticks in their back pocket? Not



It’s all about relationships. L to R: Carola Phillips, Simon Phillips, Kenny Aronoff, Tim Alexander, Bill Bruford, Gene Provencio.

exactly a one-to-one correspondence, is it? You begin to see why the analogy doesn’t hold water. Joe Testa again: “The music business can’t be compared to the sports world where the athletes wear whatever brand of sneakers they’re getting the most endorsement money for. There is a lot more money in sneakers and sports than there is in drums and music. The sneaker company has the money to pump out millions of sneakers on a machined assembly line to produce an exact customized spec that a high-profile athlete requires. It is a different mindset. This is not a high-dollar industry with a massive company pumping out drums off a high-tech assembly line full of machines.”

ARTIST INPUT

One of the obvious perks for some endorsers is signature equipment, be they snare drums, entire drum sets, sticks, heads or cymbals, all the way down to things like stick bags. Less obvious are the things that originate from suggestions from any number of working drummers, things like boom stands, hardware improvements, and shell designs. Manufacturers want to sell drums, and one of the best ways to do that is to make drums that drummers want. How do they learn that? One way is endorser feedback. To a man, all the reps from the major companies stress the importance of artist input.

First, the business viewpoint. Joe Testa describes his position: “Absolutely. Artist input is a vital part of being successful. It’s a pretty amazing thing to witness actually. I’m a firm believer in artist product evaluations, and it’s funny how into it guys get. It’s really awesome when you see a bunch of amazing artists who you respect come together in one room and get all excited about new gear. They don’t hold back either. You shouldn’t want them to. They give you—and I always beg for—the real-deal truth: Don’t sugar coat it, just tell me how it is. That is the only way to keep improving and be innovative.

“Now there are times when an artist will request a particular product that is just not economically feasible,” Testa continues, “and in most cases that artist will understand. For example, a few years ago I had an artist request a specific type of hardware that he really wanted. We did the market research for that product and found that there was a market for it, but not at the quantity levels in which we could recoup the cost of making the mold for that particular item. In this particular case, we were unable to

“A big part of the relationship is down to the people that you work with and share the endorsement with.”

- Simon Phillips

Bill Bruford sees it the same way: “Kids always want to know if you’re paid to play. I don’t know anyone who is paid to play the product, unlike, I understand, some of the sports stars. This is a common misunderstanding among young musicians.”



Wayne Wilburn: Paiste 1.5 Years

justify the making of this particular artist's request because it did not make sense from a business standpoint for us. In most cases, the artists get it—especially if they are willing to understand the business-side of the answer. That is where the 'understanding' part of what you expect from an artist comes into play: 99% get it, a few don't."

Steve Lobmeier has a similar, if more succinct, opinion: "Artist input is important, as long as the ideas aren't too esoteric and are potentially marketable."

John DeChristopher proffers Zildjian's take: "Many of our best-selling products were developed with the input of artists. This goes back to Armand Zildjian in the 1940's, and has been carried on throughout the years and decades. Getting input from artists can make all the difference in terms of a successful product."

Pearl is the world's largest drum manufacturer—they must be doing something right, and part of what they're doing is soliciting artist input. Mike Farriss acknowledges that input's importance: "Most of the changes that occur to Pearl products are a result of artist input. The artist and their techs set up and tear down kits daily. They, better than anyone, should know a product's limitations, strengths and weaknesses. Their input is very valuable."

Paiste's Wayne Wilburn concurs: "I think it is very important to know what sounds and models are working best for the artist and their music. Artist input is important, we send out prototypes for them to use and give feedback on how the cymbal is working out for them."

And for the view from the drum throne, we first go to Bruford who, with his usual acerbic eloquence, states: "Certainly it's important, but there are only so many hours in the day, and my primary concern was being a musician rather than a full-time employee of the Paiste or Tama R & D departments."

"I look for a high level of playing ability, professionalism, good attitude, and for the guy not to be an asshole." - Wayne Wilburn

Others are quick to agree. Antonio Sanchez: "The artist is the one that is playing the product every night on the road in front of people, so it's important for both the company and the artist that the product is reliable, road tested, and to the liking of the artist who uses it constantly."

Carmine Appice adds some historical perspective: "Input from the artist is important. Sometimes I need something done for me and they'd say, 'That's cool, let's put that out.' I did that with Ludwig and I'm starting to do that with ddrum. They're a very up-to-date, cutting edge company. We're having fun and already have a plan. The last time I was with a company with a plan was Ludwig in the '70s."

"No one has to give you shit; no one has to show you interest."

- Thomas Pridgen

Thomas Pridgen is in full-disclosure mode on this one: "I'm too honest—I'll tell you if this color is corny or if this snare sucks ass, I don't care. It's just cool to be around companies where they actually listen. I've been with Zildjian for 15 years and I'm only 25. I sat there at Zildjian and told them what I was looking for, and they came out with exactly what I was hearing. This was while I was attending Berklee with no gig—those artist quotes aren't fake."

To Jason Bittner, it's less of a do-or-die issue: "If it's a signature item I'm working on, then yes, it's extremely important, but not necessarily on other things," a sentiment that Todd Sucherman agrees with: "It's certainly nice, but not essential."

But it's a hot-button topic for Simon Phillips, who says, "Yes it is; and that has been my biggest beef actually. I feel in general with all drum companies there is a tendency to over-engineer things. I like my drumkit to feel like an instrument—not a collection of wood and steel. I have a problem with everything being so heavy and rigid. I believe part of that sound we all seem to love of old is because the stands and holders were light and wobbly. This meant that the actual drum could move

whilst being struck, therefore absorbing the force and resonating freely. This is, of course, a debatable concept, but I do have the advantage of remembering playing those old kits in the '60s and knowing their pros and cons. I would like to see more exotic materials used in the construction of hardware that could reintroduce a little of that 'old' feeling without sacrificing the sturdiness that we have become accustomed to."

THE UPS AND DOWNS

Like everything in life, the endorsement game has its ups and downs. It's not just about the backstage hang and free concert ticket explains Bobby Boos, "There have been times where I've shown up at a concert with product to support a player, and there's no pass at will call. It happened so many times with one guy that the recording artist's personal tour manager came up and apologized for the guy being such a knucklehead, amongst other things. Really, it's hard and often thankless work, but it's when Richie Hayward calls and invites you out, or Chester Thompson has you over for dinner and brings out a Zappa tape from 1971 live at The Roxy, or Steve Ferrone stops by to take you out to lunch that make you go, 'Ok, I'm good.'"

Artist relations has many rewards as Mike Farris adds, "There's nothing like seeing someone you take a chance on succeed. Seeing a kid you have helped graduate North Texas. Helping charities and musicians who have no insurance through fund raisers."

And of course there's the opportunity of hanging with some of the world's best, which to Marco Soccoli, never gets old, "I have to admit, sometimes I have to pinch myself... 'Holy shit, I've got Terry Bozzio in my house,' or 'I'm hanging with Phil Rudd.'"

John DeChristopher: "Contrary to what some might think, Artist Relations is hard work and it has its ups and downs. You have to strike a balance between advocating for artists, and a responsibility to the company you work for. If you go into it thinking it's all schmoozing, then you won't last in the business."

LAST WORDS

So, while it's nice to play on stuff you didn't have to pay (or pay much) for, the bottom line still is to create music and be the best drummer you can be, not how much gear you can accumulate.

Want an endorsement? Take Thomas Pridgen's advice: "Go practice your rudiments." And, don't be an asshole. ✨



blue[®] DRUMS

LIMITED EDITION
MILES DAVIS "Kind of Blue"
50th Anniversary Snare Drum



Become part of the legacy...



Drum photographed by Markus Cuff

2009 marks a year of momentous change. The one constant in our ever-changing universe is Miles Davis' timeless classic, *KIND OF BLUE*. The textures and message of this masterpiece are more significant today than they were at their inception back in 1959. This album changed everything from form to perceptions about modern Jazz. As the world celebrates the 50th anniversary of *KIND OF BLUE*, Blue Drums[®] (in conjunction with Miles Davis Properties, LLC.) also celebrates this musical masterwork by offering the **BLUE DRUMS[®] KOB 50th Anniversary Snare Drums**. These drums are made in the United States of America and are handcrafted to exacting standards.

In addition, each drum will be serial numbered, personalized for its recipient, bear a personalized *KIND OF BLUE* 50th Anniversary Badge, personalized internal labels bearing the recipient's picture and name, along with a Certificate of Authenticity from Blue Drums[®] and Miles Davis Properties, LLC. To celebrate the creative genius of Miles Davis, each drum also comes with a new Miles Davis KOB 50th Anniversary Box Set. The Blue Drums[®] KOB 50th Anniversary Snare Drum is a one of a kind offering that integrates the brilliance and quality of the past with the demands of the future. Only fifty of these instruments will be made.

Snare Drums available in 5.5" x 14" and 6.5" x 14" configurations. Shell materials are 8-Ply Rock Maple and/or 1/8" thick aircraft aluminum.

Drum pictured above is the elite *ULTRA-SENSITIVE* model of the KOB 50th Anniversary Snare Drum. Available by special order only.

5105 ECHO ROAD BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MICHIGAN 48302 USA

PHONE/FAX: (248) 757-2953



MADE WITH PRIDE
IN THE USA